

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3148

INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

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USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PARAMARIBO 0119

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, NS

SUBJ: ELECTION YEAR IN SURINAM: THE CAMPAIGN BEGINS

SUMMARY: IT'S NOT OFFICIAL AND NO DATE HAS BEEN SET, BUT SURINAM'S NATIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN FOR THE FIRST PARLIAMENT TO BE CHOSEN AFTER INDEPENDENCE IS ALREADY UNDERWAY. THE PRE-DOMINANTLY HINDUSTANI OPPOSITION VHP WANTS AT LEAST A SHARE, OR PREFERABLY A CONTROLLING INTEREST, IN THE GOVERNMENT WHILE THE GOVERNING NPK COMBINATION WANTS JUST AS MUCH TO STAY ON. WITH THE SMALLER PARTIES PUSHING AND SHOVING FOR A PLACE ON ONE OF THE TWO BIG LISTS OR AN INDEPENDENT POSITION OF THEIR OWN, ALL THE INGREDIENTS ARE PRESENT FOR A GENUINE CAMPAIGN PARTICIPATED IN BY ALL WITH SOME GUSTO.

1. PRIME MINISTER ARRON'S REFERENCE TO 1977 AS "THE YEAR OF ELECTIONS"--THE FIRST SINCE SURINAM'S INDEPENDENCE--IN HIS DECEMBER 31 NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN REGARDED AS THE UNOFFICIAL SIGNAL TO BEGIN CAMPAIGNING BY POLITICIANS, PUBLIC, AND PRESS ALIKE. ALTHOUGH A DATE FOR THE ELECTIONS STILL HAS NOT YET BEEN ANNOUNCED (THE PRESENT PARLIAMENT WAS ELECTED NOVEMBER 19, 1973, FOR A FOUR-YEAR TERM), JANUARY AND FEBRUARY

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HAVE ALREADY WITNESSED A SPATE OF MASS MEETINGS, PARTY CONCLAVES AND ELECTION-RELATED PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS. BY THE TIME SURINAM'S VOTERS TROOP TO THE POLLS--WIDELY EXPECTED TO BE SOMETIME BETWEEN JULY AND SEPTEMBER BUT COULD WELL BE LATER--EVERYONE WILL HAVE HAD AMPLE OPPORTUNITY TO DECIDE WHETHER TO STICK WITH THE NPK AND MODEST PROGRESS OR TO GIVE THE VHP A CHANCE TO SEE WHAT IT CAN MAKE OF INDEPENDENCE.

2. QUESTION NUMBER ONE HAS BEEN WHETHER THE NPK COMBINATION WILL HOLD TOGETHER. BUFFETED BY WIDESPREAD DISCONTENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S LACKLUSTER ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND SUSPICIONS OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS MINISTER BRUMA'S MOTIVES AND A GENERALLY-HELD BELIEF THAT A SUBSTANTIAL SEGMENT OF ARRON'S OWN NPS PARTY (INCLUDING PERHAPS ARRON'S DEPUTY, OLTON VAN GENDEREN) WOULD LIKE TO SEE BRUMA OUT OF THE COMBINATION, THE NPK'S LEADERS (ARRON OF THE CREOLE-BASED AND DOMINANT NPS, BRUMA OF THE LEFT-LEANING PNR, PARLIAMENT CHAIRMAN WIJNTUIN OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PSV, AND AGRICULTURE MINISTER SOEMITA OF THE JAVANESE-BASED KTPJ) HAVE ISSUED STATEMENT AFTER STATEMENT AFFIRMING THEIR INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTION AS A TEAM. IN FACT, ONLY THE NPS, AS THE PARTY COMMANDING A MAJORITY OF THE SUPPORT FROM THE CREOLE COMMUNITY, HAS A GENUINE OPTION SINCE THE OTHER THREE PARTNERS WOULD SUFFER A SUBSTANTIAL AND PERHAPS EVEN A COMPLETE LOSS OF POWER IF THEY HAD TO ENTER THE CONTEST INDEPENDENTLY.

3. WHATEVER THE EXTENT OF RUMORED AGREEMENTS BETWEEN ARRON AND BRUMA, IT NOW SEEMS CLEAR THAT BOTH INTEND TO MAINTAIN THEIR ALLIANCE INTACT. ARRON IS NOT PREPARED TO THROW IN HIS LOT WITH THE VHP IN A RETURN TO THE GRAND COALITION OF PRE-1973 DAYS, ALTHOUGH THIS POSSIBILITY DOES HAVE CONSIDERABLE APPEAL TO THE VHP AND MAY BE ATTRACTIVE TO THE ANTI-BRUMA WING OF THE NPS. FOR HIS PART, BRUMA "NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD" (AS EVIDENCED BY HIS BASICALLY MODERATE APPROACH IN THE RECENT PAST), AND HE SEEMS CONTENT TO CONTINUE IN A SECONDARY ROLE WITH ARRON

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IN THE HOPE THAT ONE DAY HE WILL INHERIT THE MANTEL OF CREOLE LEADERSHIP.

4. MEANWHILE, THE VHP, REFLECTING SIMMERING HINDUSTANI RESENTMENT OF CREOLE DOMINATION AND DISGRUNTLEMENT OVER A STAGNANT ECONOMY, IS OFFERING AN ALTERNATIVE. IN AN ATTEMPT TO APPEASE CREOLE FEARS THAT A VHP GOVERNMENT WOULD SUBSTITUTE HINDUSTANI DOMINATION FOR CREOLE, VHP LEADERS STRESS THE NON-EXCLUSIVE APPROACH OF PREVIOUS VHP REGIMES AND HAVE SURFACED THE POSSIBILITY OF A RETURN TO THE FORMER NPS-VHP COALITION. VHP LEADER LACHMON UNDOUBTEDLY HOPES THAT SUCH AN ATTITUDE WILL ALSO ENCOURAGE THE MODERATES IN THE NPS TO EXERT PRESSURE ON ARRON AND PUT SOME MORE DISTANCE BETWEEN HIM AND BRUMA. THIS COULD HAPPEN AFTER THE ELECTION, BUT IT WOULD SEEM UNLIKELY THAT THE NPS DISSIDENTS WOULD RISK AN OPEN BREAK WITH ARRON PRIOR TO THE BALLOTING. MEANWHILE, THE VHP PROMISES MORE AND BETTER DEVELOPMENT AND A STABLE ECONOMY TO ITS NATURAL HINDUSTANI CONSTITUENCY.

5. AN AS YET UNCLEAR ASPECT OF THE CAMPAIGN IS THE ROLE WHICH WILL BE PLAYED BY THE JAVANESE COMMUNITY AND THE EXTENT OF ITS SUPPORT FOR THE SEVERAL POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES COMMITTED TO JAVANESE INTERESTS. VHP LEADER LACHMON REFERRED TO THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PARAMARIBO 0119

JAVANESE AS THE "FLOATING VOTE" IN SURINAM RESPONSIBLE FOR ELECTING THE NPK IN 1973 AND THE VHP IN 1969. WITH THE CREOLE AND HINDUSTANI POPULATIONS ABOUT EVENLY DIVIDED (ALTHOUGH NO ONE HAS PRECISE FIGURES ON WHAT EFFECT THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE EXODUS OF SURINAMERS TO HOLLAND HAD ON THIS BALANCE) IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE SUPPORT OF THE 60,000 OR SO JAVANESE IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT IF NOT CRUCIAL. AT THE MOMENT, KUPI CHAIRMAN SOEMITA, WHO REMAINS TAINTED BY ACCUSATIONS OF CORRUPTION, SEEMS MUCH LESS OF AN ASSET TO THE NPK THAT HE WAS IN 1973; AND THE OPPOSITION SRI (INDONESIAN PEOPLE'S PARTY) AND PENDAWA LIMA FEDERATION ARE HOPEFUL OF CAPTURING A MAJORITY OF THE JAVANESE SUPPORT FOR THE VHP LIST.

6. THE VHP IS NOT WITHOUT ITS OWN PROBLEMS. FORMER VHP-ER GEORGE HINDORIE, WHO NOW REPRESENTS THE HPP (REFORMED PROGRESSIVE PARTY) IN PARLIAMENT, EXPECTS TO RUN INDEPENDENTLY IN THE ELECTION WITH SUPPORT FROM THE NPK IN DISTRICTS WHERE THE LATTER IS WEAK. WHETHER OR NOT HE CAN SIPHON OFF SUBSTANTIAL VHP SUPPORT IS AN OPEN QUESTION BUT SEEMS UNLIKELY. THIS WOULD NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT A VICTORIOUS NPK MIGHT SUBSEQUENTLY TAKE HINDORIE INTO THE GOVERNMENT IN AN EFFORT TO BROADEN THE BASE OF ITS SUPPORT THROUGH INVOLVEMENT OF A
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HINDUSTANI AT THE CABINET LEVEL.

7. AN ADDITIONAL UNKNOWN QUANTITY IS THE POSSIBLE FORMATION OF A "THIRD FRONT" OF "PROGRESSIVE" PARTIES WHICH HAS BEEN BRUITED ABOUT BY HENK HERRENBURG'S AND ANDRE KAMPERVEEN'S SOCIALIST PARTIES AND HAS RECEIVED THE TACIT BLESSING OF VHP LEADER LACHMON. LACHMON'S THEORY IS THAT SUCH A GROUP HAS NO APPEAL TO VHP SUPPORTERS BUT MIGHT ATTRACT VOTERS WHO OTHERWISE WOULD SUPPORT THE NPK. HOWEVER, IN LARGELY CONSERVATIVE-

MINDED MIDDLE-CLASS SURINAM, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THESE PARTIES--EVEN WERE THE BALLOTS FOR THE MORE LEFT-WING COMMUNIST PARTIES OF HUMPHREY KEERVELD (COMMUNIST PARTY OF SURINAM/M-L) AND RUBEN LIE PAW SAM (PEOPLE'S PARTY) INCLUDED--WOULD WIN MORE THAN A FEW THOUSAND VOTES.

8. IN SUM, SURINAM'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN IS ALREADY IN FULL SWING AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO HEAT UP OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS AS ELECTIONS APPROACH. THERE ARE ENOUGH UNKNOWNNS IN THE ELECTORAL EQUATION (INCLUDING THE COMPLICATED SURINAM SYSTEM COMBINING PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION ON A NATIONAL LEVEL AND IN THE TWO LARGEST DISTRICTS OF SURINAME AND PARAMARIBO WITH DIRECT ELECTION BY MAJORITY VOTE IN THE REMAINING DISTRICTS)

TO GIVE ADEQUATE EMPLOYMENT TO THE POLITICAL PUNDITS FOR SOME TIME MORE. PERHAPS IT IS THE MOST ELOQUENT TESTIMONY TO SURINAM'S DEMOCRACY TO CTNCLUDE HONESTLY THAT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO PICK A SURE WINNER.
ZURHELLEN

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